



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

My USDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

March 2011
Volume I, Issue 4

USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION
- TALENT
MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE
DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS
AND COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

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A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

With all the talk of Cultural Transformation at USDA, it's time to take a look at the actions that you have taken at the mission area, agency, and staff office levels.

This issue of *My USDA* will give you a small taste of the transformation that is occurring Department-wide as managers and employees share their stories.

We can't be idle and hope that transformation happens. We must be proactive in improving both our individual and organizational workplaces.

So take a moment to look through this issue and see how a number of USDA agencies, individual employees, and groups of employees are making workplace transformation a reality.

I'm proud to see our Student Internship Program become more diverse and robust.

I applaud the great work that two APHIS groups—one in Ames, Iowa and the other in Plum Island, New York—are accomplishing together through the Journey Toward Excellence campaign and their use of inclusive and colorful posters encouraging diversity, accountability, respect, communication, and other important values that we as the USDA workforce embrace.

The stories that many of you are starting to share about your positive work experiences are energizing and inspiring. Keep them coming. Let us know how you are bringing cultural trans-



formation to your job and to your work environment.

I encourage you to provide input and feedback as we take this journey together. You can reach the staff of *My USDA* via email at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov. And please be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Web-site](#).

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

How Federal Employees Can Express Our Points of View

GET READY! Your Voice, Your Viewpoint

It's time for the Government wide 2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView). The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has developed this survey to help measure how Federal agencies are managing and engaging the employees who carry out their agency missions. Employees will be randomly selected by OPM to participate in the survey. If you receive a survey invitation from OPM, your response is very important to help USDA meet its Cultural Transformation goals toward becoming an inclusive and high performing organization. We used your feedback from the 2010 FedView to develop action plans and implement initiatives to promote an inclusive and high performing organization. Look for more information in *MyUSDA* about this important effort.

EMPLOYEES FORM “SHARED GOALS AND EXPECTATION” (SGE) GROUP TO PROMOTE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AT APHIS

Written by the APHIS Shared Goals and Expectation (SGE) Working Group

Using survey results and the output of workplace culture visioning sessions held with more than 120 employees, APHIS employees are enthusiastically engaged in Cultural Transformation. APHIS' Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) and National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) located at Ames, Iowa, and Plum Island, NY, have created a working document reflecting the shared values of CVB and NVSL.

The key themes of Diversity, Communication, Respect, Accountability, Attitude, Work/Life Balance, Growth, and Collaboration/Teamwork form the Shared Goals and Expectations (SGE)—a guide truly written by our co-workers. Our peers then voted on the name and mark of this exciting endeavor. With 396 participants voting, we discovered we were going on a “Journey Toward Excellence,” and in November 2010, we held our kick-off event.

Management representatives from CVB and NVSL have recently been added to the SGE Working Group as resources and to help ensure the communication of monthly SGE topics in staff meetings. Each month, one of the SGE themes are highlighted on our SharePoint site using relevant AgLearn courses, reference materials, a poster, and a “Thought for the Week.” Our “Journey Toward Excellence” has resulted in a lot of good things including team development sessions...but that's another story!



Diversity

All employees, regardless of work-life experience, education or professional credentials, have a point of view and are welcome to contribute. We embrace diversity and rely on its innovation.

NVSL/CVB Shared Goals and Expectations

We own the responsibility to protect American agriculture. As cooperative organizations, we must change to become better leaders in the agricultural fields of diagnostics, development, and regulation. Respect is the key. We all have values and experiences that we bring to any effort. We are all exceptional individuals, continuously working as a community toward the same goals and expectations which include diversity.

Join the Journey!



This Diversity poster (above) is one of several created as a result of employee input and feedback at APHIS. Other poster themes are Accountability, Attitude, and Respect.



*(left) Members of the SGE Working Group are:
CVB: Bonnie Coyle, Richard DeWald, Danielle Koski
Connie Schmellik-Sandage
NVSL: Debra Atkins, Eleanor Britten, Philip Dykema,
Matthew Erdman, Patricia Glas, Tiffany Palmer*

WHAT DO YOU THINK? MESSAGES FROM USDA EMPLOYEES

My Experience With Teleworking

As a former USDA employee- now contractor- and military spouse, the topic of teleworking is of great interest to me. I am a Registered Dietitian who worked for the National Agricultural Library's Food and Nutrition Information Center. It was a professional match made in heaven for me!

As is common in military life, my husband was sent on a year-long deployment to Iraq soon after we got settled in DC. By the time he returned, I was well established in my program and had been promoted to team leader. I worked in that capacity until late 2008, when he was transferred back to the west coast. I had to resign from my position, as similar opportunities were not available where we would be moving. Unfortunately, this is a scenario that military spouses across the country face on a regular basis; leaving their careers behind and starting over with each move.

My supervisor and I talked about telecommuting, as my job is primarily web and phone based and could easily be conducted from off-site, but we learned that the telework guidelines for USDA's Agricultural Research Service at the time allowed telecommuting only up to two days per week. This was incompatible with retaining my employment with USDA. I resigned from my Federal position with USDA in 2009.

Fortunately, I had an excellent working relationship with my supervisor who encouraged me to apply for a contract position. Because the contractor did not have restrictions on telecommuting, I would be eligible to continue working for the Food and Nutrition Information Center as a contract employee. Fortunately, I was selected for this position, and have been able to continue working, full time, from off-site. Since then, my husband and I have moved yet again, but my career wasn't impacted because I am able to continue working uninterrupted.

I appreciate that I have been the recipient of good timing, supportive and forward-thinking supervisors, and probably a good deal of luck in making



this arrangement work. My only hope is that my unique situation becomes less unique and that all military spouses facing similar obstacles in their career path could continue to grow and develop in their careers with the Department of Agriculture. Expanding eligibility of the telework program, and encouraging all agencies to look at telecommuting as a powerful recruitment and retention tool is an excellent start. I would further hope that attention will be paid to the existing restrictions which restrict employees from teleworking on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. Specifically, restrictions on the number of days per week that employees can telework, or requirements that telework be conducted at established telework centers which may not be accessible from all locations. These restrictions prevent certain employees, including military spouses like me, from being able to take advantage of the telework program.

I am excited about the opportunities that teleworking will bring to USDA employees. My perspective as a teleworking military spouse has shown me that expanding the telework program has the potential to further benefit USDA by attracting and retaining high-value employees from the military spouse community. We are a group of educated, motivated, and dedicated professionals who know what it means to serve our country and would like nothing more than to continue doing so through careers with the USDA. An expanded telework program can help make that happen!

Thank you for your efforts on this important program, I look forward to hearing more about its development!

Sincerely,

Gina Hundley Gomez, RD
Team Leader, SNAP-Ed Connection
Food and Nutrition Information Center

If you'd like to share your feedback about telework, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to USDA Connect.

If you haven't read previous issues of MyUSDA, here's your chance!

[MyUSDA Issue 1](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 2](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 3](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 4—Summary Progress](#)

According to the Telework Enhancement Act:

“TELEWORK—

The term ‘telework’ or ‘teleworking’ refers to a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee’s position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work.”

Supervisor's Spotlight!

D. YVETTE JOYNER, APHIS

D.Yvette Joyner is the Director for Animal Care/Resource Management Staff in APHIS and has been employed by USDA for 23 years. Ms. Joyner currently supervises 8 employees and has implemented Telework for those that are eligible over the past four years. She spoke with My USDA's Mika Cross.

Please tell us what we could find you doing on a daily basis:

On a daily basis you would find me planning and/or directing the broad financial, cultural transformation, and program related activities of the Animal Care program. This involves a high degree of awareness regarding the state of our financial environment to be sure we are compliant with Congressionally imposed limitations surrounding the CR, overseeing one of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation initiatives such as recruitment and retention, and keeping a close eye on our performance management to be sure the program is on track to meet targets set earlier in the fiscal year.

As an early adopter of Telework throughout the past several years, what are the key benefits from your perspective as a supervisor:

The benefits I've seen include less absenteeism, assisting employees with balancing work and family life needs, and increased productivity. A recent example of balancing work and family life was an employee needing to take her daughter to an appointment near their home. Instead of traveling over an hour to get to USDA @ Riverside, working a few hours, and leaving in enough time to pick up her daughter from school to get to the appointment, she worked at home before and after the appointment which was in the middle of the day. Since the appointment and her daughter were in the same vicinity of her home, it just made more sense to work from home that day. This reduced her

stress and allowed her to be more productive than she would have been had she taken the day off or only put in 3-4 hours at the office.



Tell us how you think Supervisors can learn to implement Telework successfully for their workgroups:

I think the best tactic is for a supervisor to try it themselves to see the benefits and perhaps they'll understand the positive impact on productivity and be able to become more open-minded in allowing it more routinely for their employees. It's my belief that if they experience the uninterrupted time where they can turn out critical documents, they will gain a new appreciation for this flexibility.

The Spotlight's on YOU!

SAM SHANKLIN

Security Driver for the Secretary

Written by Perry Stevens

Mr. Sam Shanklin has spent the last 45 years serving his country. Two of those years he served in the U.S. Military, but the last 43 years he has been a valued employee of the USDA. He started out in the mailroom but before long, he began driving for the Secretary's office. "That was back in 1970," Shanklin says. "I was the baby driver back then, the youngest one. The main driver for the Secretary at that time was Bernard "Tommy" Thompson, and he taught me all I know. You get the job done, and you keep the boss happy. Through the years, I've kept that in mind. He said be good to people because the same people you meet going up the ladder are the ones you might see coming back down it."

Mr. Shanklin drove for the Deputy Secretary until 1979 when he took over the job as Security Driver for the Secretary. He's seen a lot of Secretaries come and go, but he particularly likes his latest boss. "You know, they've all been good, but the one I've got now is very good. I like him. He's one of the reasons I'm still here. Last year, they offered us a buyout, but I like this Secretary, and I like his family, and I wanted to stay."

With all the history he's seen, maybe he should write a book. "No way," he grins. "If I wrote a book I'd have to go into the witness protection program and move out of town!"



Security Driver for the Secretary Sam Shanklin (right) posing for a photograph with the Reverend Al Sharpton who recently met with the Secretary at USDA headquarters.

FOREST SERVICE WORKS TO ACHIEVE DIVERSITY



Forest Service Human Resources Director Robin D. Bailey, Jr. (seen on the right) makes interacting with employees a high priority.

When Robin D. Bailey, Jr., began in his position as Director of Human Resources for the Forest Service, he spent a lot of time meeting and getting to know the 500 employees who comprised the staff at the Albuquerque Service Center-Human Resources Management (ASC-HRM). The outcome of some of those conversations was the establishment of the Director's Advisory Group for Employees with Special Needs.

Written by Mary Jane Bergener

needed to overcome any challenges they faced on the job.

The group soon expanded to include members of community organizations such as the Commission for the Blind, The Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Community Outreach Program for the Deaf,

The group was initially comprised of HRM employees with special needs who met with Mr. Bailey to discuss the difficulties they encountered when seeking employment and what assistance they

New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Governors Commission on Disabilities. Together, this group addressed a host of employment issues, including making sure the application process was easy to understand and follow and determining what resources are necessary to ensure employees are successful once they are hired.

The results of this group's work have been impressive. One of their major accomplishments was hosting a booth at the 2010 Southwest Disabilities Conference, where HRM employees were available to assist conference-goers in applying for positions. This effort resulted in making job offers to nearly 20 disabled applicants.

Increasing the Use of Student Employment Programs

The Human Resources Management Workforce Planning Staff and the Human Resources Information Systems Staff, under the direction of Assistant Director Rhonda Flores, has developed an electronic database to assist with tracking students throughout their employment and development in the Forest Service. The recently demonstrated system will allow leadership to review data for trends and analyze the information for adjustments in our processes.

The system will also enhance our reporting capabilities for all of leadership and assist us in making wise decisions in the student employment process.



HRM students on a field trip to the Santa Fe National Forest. They had the opportunity to talk to a district ranger (in the photo on the left) and learn about the types of positions that are available in forestry. They also got to view the work being accomplished on a watershed restoration project.

USDA made history on March 9, 2011, when Mr. William P. Milton Jr.,

USDA Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) and Clyde Thompson, Deputy Administrator for Management (DAM) and RD Diversity Officer met to discuss the implementation of Indian Preference in Rural Development (RD).

Indian Preference http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/indian_preference.html is required by law to provide absolute preference to American Indians/Alaska Natives who are enrolled in a federally recognized tribe as defined by the Secretary of the Interior. To be considered a "preference" eligible within the Indian Health Service, an applicant claiming Indian preference must submit a copy of a properly completed & signed form BIA 4432 ("Verification of Indian Preference for employment in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service Only") certifying that he/she is an Indian as defined by the IHS Manual Part 7 Chapter 3. The Servicing Human Resource office will then determine verification of Indian Preference.

The meeting came about when Mr. Jim Norland, Alaska State Director, Rural Development, spoke to Secretary Vilsack about hiring challenges he faced in Bethel, Alaska to fill key USDA vacancies. Mr. Norland stated that he faced high turnover of employees and difficulties filling vacan-

RURAL DEVELOPMENT MAKES HISTORY BY IMPLEMENTING INDIAN PREFERENCE

Written by Monshi R. Ramdass and Retha Oliver

cies in rural Alaska. The challenges Mr. Norland faced were due to pay differences, high cost of living and the remote location. He thought that it would be more strategic to recruit and hire from the local community instead of nationally to fill vacancies in Bethel. Based on his concerns, Ms. Robin Heard, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Administration, called a meeting to discuss the hiring challenges that Mr. Norland raised with Secretary Vilsack. After a series of additional meetings, Mr. Thompson agreed to utilize Indian Preference to hire qualified applicants from the local community to fill key vacancies in Bethel.

Due to key leadership involvement, the implementation of Indian Preference was initiated for the first time in the history of USDA. This initiative will lead to outreach and recruitment from the local community in Bethel, Alaska. Because of this initiative, USDA can now have employees that possess the skills, knowledge, and abilities to include the

cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge needed to enhance our posture to communicate and conduct business with the people that we serve. The initiation of Indian Preference is at the heart of Cultural Transformation and the Diversity Road Map.

Rural Development is on the cutting edge as the first and only USDA agency using this guideline to shape hiring strategies.

RD recognizes that inclusiveness is a win/win proposition, offering opportunity to all groups as it brings additional, varied strengths to an organization.

Particularly in communities with higher concentrations of Native Americans, it is hoped that Native administrators and staff will add not only individual skills and expertise, but cultural insights that enhance program planning, administration, and promotion. Existing ties to communities may also support long-term commitment to positions.

Front Row: Thelma Floyd, Director, Civil Rights, Operations and Management, Rhonda Brown, Outreach Coordinator, Operations and Management Retha Oliver, Acting Director, Human Resources, Operations and Management. **Second Row:** Tedd Buelow, Native American Coordinator, Operations and Management, Clyde Thompson, Deputy Administrator, Operations and Management and RD Diversity Officer, Monshi R. Ramdass, Director Recruitment and Diversity, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)





USDA Hires Disability Employment Program Manager to Increase Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

to work outcomes for injured or sick workers. As a result, there will be increased collaborations and resource sharing between the Workers Compensation and disability employment programs.

On July 26, 2010, President Obama signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13548, re-establishing a goal set by former President Clinton that 100,000 individuals with disabilities will be hired into Federal service during the next five years. To achieve this goal, agencies are required to develop 5-year plans that include performance targets and numerical goals for employment of individuals with disabilities. Sub-goals will identify how persons with targeted or more severe disabilities will also be hired.

Under the order, Federal agencies must also include strategies to facilitate higher return

To lead USDA's efforts the Departmental Office of Human Resources Management has hired Alison Levy (pictured above) as the new Departmental Disability Employment Program Manager. In her previous 20+ years' experience, Ms. Levy has worked to improve employment of people with disabilities in the non-profit, post-secondary and Federal government environments. She has developed disability-related policies, procedures, and expanded services related to reasonable accommodations, in addition to creating improved systems for recruiting, hiring, advancing, and retaining individuals with disabilities.

Get Ready for Public Service Recognition Week, May 1-7, 2011!

What better time to acknowledge and thank the USDA workforce for the service provided day in and day out to America than during Public Service Recognition Week? The event is held May 1st through May 7th and offers us a wonderful opportunity to show appreciation to each other for the work we do and to showcase USDA's value to the public.

Some easy ideas to implement that week are suggested by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) below:

- o Encourage your employees to talk about their work with local schools or civic groups throughout the week;
- o Use video to get the message out. OPM is launching "Federal Workers Unscripted" www.youtube.com/fedsunscripted;
- o Consider an all agency event to share information about different work units of your organization;
- o Open your agency for job shadowing or career fair events;
- o Greet your employees at the door and thank them for their service;
- o Send all-staff messages of appreciation.

"Today, only 5 percent of the federal workforce is made up of Americans with disabilities—far below the proportion of Americans with disabilities in the general population, so we're going to boost recruitment, we're going to boost training; we're going to boost retention.....

Executive departments and agencies must improve their efforts to employ workers with disabilities through increased recruitment, hiring and retention of these individuals. My administration is committed to increasing the number of individuals with disabilities in the Federal workforce."

—President Obama

Morris Tate serves as the Director for Business Ser-

vices in the Office of Operations, Departmental Management, at the USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. Lines of business included are management and program studies and analyses, personnel and work life program specialists, occupational health units, disability resources (USDA TARGET Center), sign language interpreting services, printing and copier services, mail management, shipping and receiving, surplus property disposal, forms and publications storage and distribution, and central supply management.

Mr. Tate began his federal career as a Civil Engineer with the USDA, Soil Conservation Service in 1968, worked as a Civil and Structural Engineer in the private sector from 1974 to 1981, returned to Federal service as a facilities manager with the U. S. Marine Corps until 2000 when he came to USDA headquarters as the headquarters facilities operations and maintenance director in the Office of Operations. In 2003, he was reassigned within the Office of Operations as the director for business services. He talked with My USDA's Mika Cross.

How did you come up with the idea to develop a shared office space for your staff? Were they already teleworking? What compelled you to expand it?

The Office of Operations has permitted teleworking both on a regular/recurring and ad hoc basis



Morris Tate, Director of Business Services for Departmental Management, is a strong supporter of teleworking and shared office space.

Shared Office Space = Shared Success for Telework

for many years; however it was not widely practiced. The Business Services unit was established in 2003, and included a number of analysts and assistants whose duties were well suited for telework. Those who were interested were allowed to telework one day per week, and six out of seven elected to do so. When that proved successful, they were allowed to increase to two days per week.

Please describe your staff: (Grade, positions/jobs performed, occupational series, composition, etc)

The Business Services unit of the Office of Operations includes a wide variety of grades, positions and occupational series, including General Schedule (GS) GS-04 to GS-15, Wage System (WS) WS-04 to WS-05, and Printing Series (XS) XS-07 to XS-11. Positions eligible for regular/recurring telework are predominately in the GS-0300 series.

Tell us about the shared office space concept:

These seven employees (five analysts and two management assistants) worked in adjacent offices along a corridor, and five of them worked a compressed 5/4/9 schedule with one day off every two weeks. With two days a week teleworking and one day every two weeks off due to the compressed work schedule, it readily became apparent that offices were frequently vacant. That gave the opportunity to realize one of the often touted benefits of teleworking, which is to reduce the office space needs. The idea of consolidating two people into one shared workstation was readily accepted by the group (being professional analysts, their inefficient use of space was obvious to them).

The six teleworkers chose their partners and their schedules, and the process of consolidating six employees into three offices, with one workstation each, began. The pairs were permitted to choose the type of furniture that would be suitable to them both. Some chose adjustable height desks and others preferred basic standard desks. Actual new purchases were minimal. Enough ergonomic chairs were already being used, one existing desk was retained, one adjustable height desk was surplus from another office, and one office got a new desk.



Morris Tate (right) and co-worker Ron Cotton at a shared work station.

The one analyst who chose not to telework contributes to the team by sharing his office with a networked all-in-one printer/scanner/copier, a spare workstation used by teleworkers who need to be in the office when they typically were scheduled to be away, and a set of small lockers for personal items that employees choose to leave at the office when they are away. The desk for the spare workstation is also an adjustable height desk that was surplus from another office.

As a reward for their positive attitudes and excellent teleworking skills, each of the offices got new carpet and paint, which was a morale booster.

How do you manage your employees when they are not in the office? How do you account for meetings, scheduling issues, etc?

Business Services uses a shared calendar in Microsoft Outlook where everyone's schedule is posted, including telework, AWS days off, scheduled leave, meetings, etc. Teleworkers call in to a conference line for weekly staff meetings. Employees check in with the supervisor each morning either by phone or e-mail, and comment on their work plan for the day. Most of them use e-mail. During the work day, communications between the employees and the supervisor occurs as it normally would, except for face to face contact.

Do you allow your employees to participate in flexible or alternative work



One example of shared office space

schedules in addition to telework? How long have you been authorizing this?

Compressed and flexible work schedules have long been permitted, and teleworking does not change that. There have been no problems associated with teleworkers using various schedules.

What are the top five benefits you see from this way of doing business?

The environmental benefits of reduced air pollution and reduced traffic and public transportation congestion are significant.

The time saved by not commuting is a direct benefit for employees in terms of increased rest, personal energy, and time available for personal and family matters. The result is improved morale and greater productivity.

Teleworkers are much more available for duty during inclement weather or major transportation disruptions and even for partial days when they use leave for personal matters for part of a day. This substantially improves the continuity of operations.

Employees and the employer save money by avoiding direct commuting costs, including the employer provided subsidy for public transportation. Other potential savings for the employees are meal costs, reduced wardrobe maintenance, etc. Cost avoidance for an employee is as good as a pay raise.

Changing work locations gives a break from routine and provides stimulus that improves productivity. Studies have shown this, and these employees find it to be so.

What would be your top five recommendations for implementing telework for a work/team who have never done so before?

Implement one step at a time, and give enough time at each step to evaluate and adjust. Start with one day per week, or even one day per pay period, and add days when the process proves to be reliable. Some employees will adapt faster than others.

Allow the employees as much freedom as possible to select their own schedules and partners.

Require the use of high performance computers and peripherals at the home office, whether government-furnished or employee-owned. Not all are proficient with technology, and at home one cannot readily get assistance. Use a call forwarding service that can be activated remotely, so the office phone can be forwarded to the home or mobile phone from any location.

Establish a convenient method of displaying everyone's schedules that all can see. A shared calendar on the network works well.

Be clear about the check-in and communication requirements between the teleworkers and the supervisor, and be diligent about enforcement. That will help it become a habit. In the on-site office, employees are accustomed to simply beginning their work. Checking in and reporting the work plan for the day is a new procedure.

**NEW TELEWORK
TRAINING FOR LEADERS**

The inaugural class for USDA's new Telework Training for Leaders (pictured below) met on February 10th, the first of twelve sessions where more than 300 supervisors and managers successfully certified their approval authority for USDA's newly redesigned Telework Program.

The training focused mostly on honing important leadership skills that translates to successful teambuilding and employee engagement—no matter where the office location. Participants engaged in interactive discussions about the benefits and challenges to managing employees in a Telework environment and walked away with key tactics for introducing effective performance management elements for all their employees.

This training meets just one of the many requirements of the new [Telework Enhancement Act of 2010](#) that USDA must complete by June of 2011. Additional sessions of the class are planned for interactive web-based delivery this Spring, and additional Telework training for employees will be available in AgLearn.



The Secret to Dana's Success – Whatever It Takes! And Always ... Learning, Improving, & Partnering

Dana Askins is a Human Resources Specialist and Professional with USDA Forest Service, who recently completed a detail to the Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) supporting the Policy Division in Washington, D.C.

During my 23 years of experience in human resources management, I have worked with many diverse individuals from a variety of Federal agencies with very different missions. I started out with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a Co-op Student (now they call them SCEPs). After graduation, I was fortunate to be converted to a career appointment and spent the mid-career years at the Departments of Justice, Interior, and Energy. Those jobs provided me a breadth of experience, knowledge, and confidence that enforced the belief that I could be successful in my personal and professional goals and aspirations.

But it was only after I arrived at USDA's Forest Service that I learned to focus on the leadership qualities of listening, learning, and taking action. When we demonstrate leadership with these qualities, we can improve the culture and service of our whole organization.

Listening: I joined the Forest Service in 2009 shortly after the Agency consolidated its many Human Resources (HR) functions into one office located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The transition was a difficult one by all accounts. At that time, the Agency was ranked among the worst places to work in the Federal Government. The thing that turned that around was Leadership's willingness to listen to its employees and make adjustments and improvements to its HR services. Leadership reached out to their customers with the goal of establishing a relationship of mutual trust and shared leadership accountability amongst line managers, supervisors, HR Management and employees. The changes have resulted in a remarkable impact on the workforce. I have witnessed improved partnering, an increase in learning, and contin-



ued efforts to make improvements to all aspects of Human Resources. This makes me proud to wear green!

Last spring, I was selected to participate in an Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sponsored Leadership Development Program. The first concept that I learned is that all leaders don't have to be supervisors or managers. They can be the person sitting next to you. The second concept that I learned is that technical expertise may get you into the program, but it is not what will carry you forward as a leader. To succeed as a leader, you have to learn about yourself, invest in yourself and others, and be prepared to work hard.

Learning: I had to ask myself some serious questions. What makes me tick? Why do I react the way I do in certain situations? What are my core values?

So, I embarked on the task of developing a plan of action to become a better leader. One of my goals is to build relationships through partnering. My plan included developing networks, building alliances, and collaborating across boundaries to build strategic relationships to achieve common

goals. And I thought, USDA watch out, here I come!!!

Taking Action: Now, I am actually living one of the most exciting moments of the Leadership Development Program. Most recently, I have been privileged to be on a detail to the Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) where I served in the Policy Division. This assignment gave me perspective that I have not had before. The Secretary's Cultural Transformation Initiative is proving to make USDA a better workplace and I have been glad to witness that transformation from a Departmental perspective. The cultural transformation's continued success aligns with my values and beliefs. I believe our progress will continue. In making the transformation happen, we are listening, learning, and committed to taking action to effect change.

**“I have
concluded
my lifelong
leadership
philosophy is
to listen,
learn, and
take action.”**

**—Dana
Askins**

SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH STUDENT INTERN REFORMS AT USDA!

Written by Zina B. Sutch

Few efforts in recruiting diverse and talented individuals to USDA are as important as a vibrant and coordinated student employment program. A coordinated program benefits all agencies and lets us share information, candidate resumes, and best practices while working together to address challenges and improve demographics. To meet this challenge, in FY 2010, USDA created a student internship program (SIP) that is coordinated Department-wide with the goal of ensuring cross-agency communications, excellent and diverse candidate pools, meaningful experiences for interns and employers, and accountability. This initiative is directed towards high school students or students enrolled in a degree-granting institution who meet the requirements of either Federal student employment authorities or of affinity groups, associations and professional organizations with which USDA networks.

As we moved into FY 2011, the new working group, along with the Virtual University, has made great progress towards reaching some of the major goals established by the 2010 working group. In order to enhance inter-Mission Area communication and outreach we have created an Intern Recruiter/Coordinator community on USDA Connections.

Rolando Loya, Regional Recruitment Specialist, Region 6, US Forest Service



rolando.loya@usda.gov

<https://connections.usda.gov> where we provide support through the sharing of resumes, guidance documents, information on all student hiring authorities, contact information to affiliations and associations, and allow for free discussions among recruiters and coordinators across USDA mission areas. Additionally, we have started utilizing a social networking site, USDA Academy <https://USDA-Academy.com>. Currently we have an e-mail address, USDA.Internships@dm.usda.gov, where students can send specific questions related to USDA's Student Intern Program and submit their transcripts and resumes if they are inter-

ested in an internship with USDA but just don't know who to contact. We then get that information into the right hands. A one-stop application can found be at

<http://www.studentapplication.usda.gov>

To ensure that our USDA student internship program optimizes the ability to identify a diverse and high-potential



"USDA agencies depend on SIP to get qualified, diverse applicants for both mission critical and temporary positions. We're not only shaping the future workforce, we are preparing a new generation of employees to be more practice and receptive to innovation."—Wendy Carrasco, Human Resources Specialist, Student Employment Programs Manager, Departmental Management,

candidate pool, we provide virtual training to our USDA Intern Recruiters and Coordinators. On February 9th and 10th of 2011, we held our First Annual Intern Recruiter/Coordinator Training where we identified and shared available resources, contact information to leverage External Programs, best practices, and available hiring authorities. In this training, we had representation from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to address some of the federal changes in hiring authorities. More than 70 recruiters, coordinators and others across USDA, from the field and headquarters participated.



Once our interns have been selected, we want to make sure their

"The Student Intern Program is a great opportunity for USDA to develop future leaders, a diverse workforce, and a 21st century workplace. Dynamic Development = Retention."—Maisha Davis, Management Services, Planning, Coordination & Accountability Staff Maisha.Davis@usda.gov

experience is positive and meaningful. Our working group developed several tools for supervisors to help in structuring a valuable intern experience. The On-boarding Portal at www.dm.usda.gov/OBP, developed by OHRM for supervisors and employees, provides guidance on how to bring a new employee on board. It's also a guide for our intern supervisors and sponsors. That guidance and a supervisor checklist ensure that each intern receives the same attention and positive experience that any new employee would receive. We have also provided a Capstone Project guideline and a Draft Performance Feedback Tool on USDA Connections. These resources provide a process for supervisors to use while developing meaningful and valuable work experiences for their interns. The Capstone Project guide walks a supervisor through the steps they should take when developing a purposeful project that lasts the entire internship semester. The Draft Performance Feedback Tool, provides a way in which supervisors can establish expectations for the intern and provide feedback in a beneficial way.

Through these new resources, supports, guidelines, training opportunities and communications, we are making great progress towards establishing a high quality student internship experience for interns across USDA. Through coordinated efforts, we are presenting ourselves as One USDA to our new recruits and attracting a talented and diverse population of new employees.



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov



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Be sure to visit [USDA's Cultural Transformation Website](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov) (<http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov>)

(e-Authentication required)

INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY CREATE A CUSTOMER AND EMPLOYEE-FOCUSED ENVIRONMENT

Written by Valman Cummins and Tanya-Coram Howard

Maximizing the Business Case for Cultural Transformation

After Secretary Vilsack kicked off the USDA Cultural Transformation Initiative in September 2009, Farm Service Agency (FSA) leadership built a framework for an innovative approach to making cultural transformation happen at FSA. Top leadership needed training, so Administrators, State Executive Directors, and Farm Loan Chiefs gathered in New Mexico a few months ago to explore and understand issues related to cultural differences: Diversity and inclusion; Communication; Stereotypes; Economic impact of discrimination; Race/Ethnicity/Nationality, and Generational differences.



One purpose of the training was to improve customer service to our diverse customer base. The unique training design and delivery subjected managers who are responsible for leading FSA's programs to experience the same type of frustrations a customer may endure due to a lack of understanding of cultural differences.

During this program, managers and supervisors were subjected to an intense facilitated training, where they had to come to grips with their own individual biases, stereotypes, and cross cultural insensitivities, in order to address how they will improve customer service and support USDA employees who may face the same challenges.

FSA's vision is to ensure that the Cultural Transformation Learning Experience has been specific enough to address barriers to a discrimination-free work environment. By exposing Agency decision makers to the challenges that employees may experience in dealing with diverse clients, they have an increased commitment to maintain a high ethical cultural standard. These lessons also serve managers well in having more effective and satisfactory interaction with USDA's diverse workforce. All employees, regardless of their position, should value the importance of having a moral compass that is ethically and culturally aligned to support diversity, inclusivity, and high performance.

FNS INCREASING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

*Written by
Frank
McDonough*

Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNCS) is engaged in a host of cultural transformation activities. The recent commitment by twenty (20) employees to embrace Cultural Transformation's continuous process improvement challenge is but one. Employees dedicated 72 hours each in February to participate in rigorous Lean Six Sigma Green Belt training at FNS Headquarters in Alexandria, VA. Lean and Six Sigma are process improvement methodologies designed to increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The nationwide cross-section of participants represented multiple program areas and disciplines. Headquarters personnel were joined by colleagues from Georgia, Denver, and California. Our Green Belts are already applying the learned tools and methodologies to generate valuable process improvement projects. They will be continuing to work toward Lean Six Sigma USDA Green Belt Certification. This training and its follow-along projects further the Secretary's cultural transformation initiative in fostering excellence and customer service by empowering employees with the knowledge and skills to propel FNCS toward becoming an even higher-performing organization.

As a result of this introspective training, managers left even more personally committed to supporting a discrimination free workplace that is customer centric, employee focused, and committed to the highest moral and ethical standards. Each manager developed and documented their commitment in their personal transformation action plans.



L-R seated: Elvira May (SNAP-Benefits Redemption Division); Michael Ribar (SNAP-Benefits Redemption Division); David Lum (Management-Contracting Management Division); B. Warren Brooks (ORACSS-Office of Research and Analysis); L-R standing: Scott Fowler (Longevity Consulting); Michael Schooler (Deloitte Consulting)

USDA Office of Tribal Relations and the Intertribal Agriculture Council meet to conduct training and discuss technical assistance activities geared towards fostering new relationship between USDA and Indian Country.



Members of the Intertribal Agriculture Council's USDA Tribal Technical Assistance Network

Front row: Michelle Radice, NASS American Indian Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM); Janie Hipp, USDA Office of Tribal Relations; Danielle Notah; Anita Matt; Dustin Miller, USDA Office of Tribal Relations, **Second Row:** Ross Racine, Executive Director Intertribal Agriculture Council; Zachary Butler; Katherine Minthorn Goodluck; Zach Ducheneaux, Program Manager; Kole Kilpatrick; and Mike Shellenberger.

USDA Office of Tribal Relations met with members of the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) to discuss technical assistance and aiding producers and rural businesses in applying for and receiving assistance through USDA programs. This effort will build success in Indian Country through the more effective use of USDA programs.

Office of Tribal Relations at USDA and the IAC are fostering new and enhanced relationships with Indian Tribes throughout the country by providing services such as:

- ◆ Financial planning
- ◆ Conservation planning
- ◆ Financial literacy
- ◆ Record keeping
- ◆ Risk management
- ◆ Civil rights
- ◆ Federal Regulations
- ◆ Understanding the AG Census

In addition, USDA and the IAC are creating working relationships with Indian producers to match their goals and objectives. Through these relationships, producers and community leaders and members can find the right agency and the right programs to enhance their success in building rural businesses. IAC will also serve as a bridge with Tribal Leaders and Tribal organizations and work to form or improve Tribal-Federal Partnerships on reservation or through area-wide programs. This partnership is an excellent example of how relationships, technical assistance, and outreach can change and influence the perceptions of USDA with the people we serve.



Cultural Transformation Becoming a Way of Life at Food Safety and Inspection Service

Cultural Transformation is more than words on a page for the Food Safety and Inspection Service. Cultural Transformation is being incorporated into what FSIS says, but more importantly, it is an integral part of *everything* the Agency does.

FSIS found a way to combine Cultural Transformation with Under Secretary Elisabeth Hagen's message of One Team, One Purpose. One Team, One Purpose is based on three priorities:

- ◆ Prevention
- ◆ Tools
- ◆ People

And it's on our people that Cultural Transformation is achieved. It is built on the 10,000-strong workforce focused on improving food safety by working together.

With 85 percent of FSIS employees in the field, the Agency wanted employees to know that food safety begins with them and that their role is vital to the mission of protecting public health. As a result, FSIS held listening sessions, brown bag lunches and asked employees to complete an "Employee Viewpoint Survey." The survey results showed the Agency was headed in the right direction but that more could be done. The Agency took the employee recommendations to heart and is implementing many of them. In addition, it has formed a Cultural Transformation Workgroup to keep the discussions going. Made up of representatives from each program area, the purpose of the workgroup is to make sure employees are learning and living the cultural transformation message at work.

FSIS Cultural Transformation Workgroup Members

Lorena Carrasco (OM) – Executive Sponsor, Karen Jackson (OM) – Coordinator, Sylvia Bourn (OOEET), Janet McGinn (OPPD), Nick Bauer (ODIFP), Jennifer McKean (OFO), Greg DiNapoli (OPACE), Ndidi Mojay (OPACE), Donna O'Dowd (OPHS), Mary Gioglio (OM), Deborah Reilly (OPEER), Rich Gray (OPHS), Kay Stapleton (OPHS), John Hicks (OPPD), Rasika Tripathy (OCIP), Renee Hicks (OIA), Tina Weems (OFO), John Linville (OPPD), Stephanie Wilkins (OOEET)